

SENATE BILL REPORT

E2SHB 3306

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Higher Education, February 27, 2008

Title: An act relating to electronic learning at institutions of higher education.

Brief Description: Regarding eLearning at institutions of higher education.

Sponsors: House Committee on App Subcom Ed (originally sponsored by Representatives Wallace and Dunn).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/13/08, 96-0.

Committee Activity: Higher Education: 2/20/08, 2/27/08 [DPA-WM].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Shin, Chair; Kilmer, Vice Chair; Delvin, Ranking Minority Member; Berkey, Schoesler and Sheldon.

Staff: Aldo Melchiori (786-7439)

Background: Nationwide, in the fall term of 2006, almost 3.5 million students were taking at least one online course. This is a nearly 10 percent increase over the number reported the previous year. That growth rate exceeds the 1.5 percent growth rate of the overall higher education student population. Two-year, associate degree granting institutions have the highest growth rates and account for over one-half of all online enrollments for the last five years nationally. Baccalaureate institutions began the period with the fewest online enrollments, and have had the lowest rates of growth.

In 1999 the Legislature adopted a budget proviso directing the Office of Financial Management (OFM) to develop a system for collecting consistent data on students enrolled in electronic learning (eLearning) courses. Enrollment reporting of eLearning Full Time Equivalent (FTE) was defined by OFM as an academic course where teachers and students are physically separate for a predominant amount of the instructional contact hours. Since data started being collected in 2000, enrollments in eLearning courses have remained relatively flat at the public four-year institutions and have increased significantly in the community and technical college system. In the fall term of 2000, enrollments in four-year institutions accounted for 2 percent of total FTEs.

In the community and technical colleges system, eLearning enrollments made up 3.5 percent of the total enrollments. In the fall of 2006, eLearning enrollments comprised 2.4 percent of

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Baccalaureate enrollments, while the percentage had grown to 8.4 percent for the community and technical colleges. Started in 1997 by the community and technical college system, WashingtonOnline (WAOL) provides online courses that can be used by any college in the system. The WAOL serves about 40,000 students each year, roughly 4,100 annualized FTEs and allows colleges to pool enrollments so that smaller colleges can provide online course work to any enrolled student in an affordable way.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Amendments): A work group, jointly convened by the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (WTECB) and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, is to take the following actions related to electronically distributed learning: (1) review and establish standards and best practices; (2) recommend methods to increase student access as well as identify barriers to participation and completion; (3) determine methods to increase the supply of open course materials; (4) recommend methods to increase the availability of digital open textbooks; and (5) review and report demographic information on programs of study including enrollments, retention, and completion.

The WTECB identifies and evaluates current national private employer workplace-based educational programs with distance learning components provided by higher education public institutions. The evaluation must include a literature review, direct surveys of programs, determination of feasibility, an overview of technological considerations, and cost factors. The preliminary results of the study are to be reported to the Legislature by December 1, 2008, and a final report is due on December 1, 2009.

The WTECB forms a task force to select up to eight institutions of higher education, including at least four community or technical colleges, to develop and offer pilot projects providing employer workplace-based educational programs with distance learning components. Institutions apply to become pilot colleges and are selected based upon established criteria. By September 2008, the WTECB selects employers using established criteria. They have the ability to offer employment and workplace-based educational programs with distance learning components in cooperation with selected higher education institutions. The pilot program is evaluated by December 1, 2012.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE (Recommended Amendments): The WTECB identifies and evaluates current national private employer workplace-based educational programs with distance learning components provided by higher education public institutions. The WTECB forms a task force to develop and offer pilot projects providing employer workplace-based educational programs with distance learning components

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Engrossed Second Substitute Bill: PRO: This is an idea whose time has come. Students say that some of their best courses are eLearning

classes because, by this method, they have access to national and international scholars. We need to make certain that all eLearning offerings have the quality we want. Digital technologies are changing fast and are transforming education. We need to make sure that Washington students are not left behind. This is an essential part of improving access to education and workforce training.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Wallace, prime sponsor; Cable Green, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Madeline Thompson, Workforce Training and Coordinating Board.